

HI: So first off I just want to thank you for making the time, and my apologies about the scheduling, first COVID and then the Glasgow Fair Day, which was unexpected.

CK: So you're not from Glasgow, I gather?

HI: No, I'm a recent transplant to Glasgow.

CK: From where?

HI: I grew up in Berkeley is where I'm from originally.

CK: Yeah, I was going to say, you sound unmistakably American, but I can't place the locale. You don't sound Californian.

HI: Well, I spent the last 10 years living in Toronto.

CK: Okay. That's very British.

HI: Yeah. So I feel like Toronto has tempered my California accent.

CK: Yeah, flattened it out a bit, taking off the hotspots. Normally the California accent is quite pronounced, but you have to have an ear for it. Not everyone can spot it. I can usually spot it. I have a totally different accent. I'm East Coast.

HI: Yeah, right. So let's start chatting a little bit. I mean, just to give you a little bit of background, right? Like Band Camp wants to do this as a real sort of overview of your career, right?

CK: A retrospective, if you will.

HI: Yeah. I'd sort of pitched it as, as even just sort of going through some of your best records, but they were like, no, let's do a larger more robust piece covering your career. So yes, I think retrospective is probably the right term to describe it. And, with that in mind, I think it's probably best to start really at the beginning. And I know that that maybe is not super exciting, to rehash some biographical stuff, but I thought that it might be useful here to just talk a little bit about, I think I'm interested in your entrance both into music more generally, right? Well, electronic music, and I've read a little bit about other interviews where you've talked about this and also how that coincides with your entrance into politics, right? And sort of the way that these two are very much, I think, entwined and indeed perhaps inseparable across your career. So you grew up in New York, is that right?

CK: That's right. I grew up in Midtown Manhattan.

HI: And what was your introduction to music? Was that from childhood? Are you playing, listening to music? What was, what was the scene like?

CK: Yes. Well, I grew up during the hard rock period, meaning bands like Deep Purple, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Pink Floyd of course, Led Zeppelin. My first serious concert was Led Zeppelin. My first not serious concert, meaning just it

wasn't as big a deal, it was a smaller venue, was Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five, the Hues Corporation and Blue Magic at Radio City Music Hall, and though it's not politically correct to say so, I'm pretty sure that my school chums and I were the only white people in Radio City Music Hall that night, and we got a lot of strange looks. But nobody bothered us, and it was a great show. Michael Jackson was just a little kid, of course. He did the robot, and it was pretty sensational. That would've been about 1975 or 76. I saw Led Zeppelin in 76, and then again in 77 in Madison Square Garden.

And so that really shaped my worldview. I was very influenced by *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I knew it backwards and forwards, and still do. There's a complicated point here that I'm going to harp on a lot. There's two parallel points that I'm going to make. This is part of a project I've been working on. There's an academic you may have never heard of, called Joan Sera, who wrote a very interesting paper on the decline of complexity in Western music. So we have the data now. I mean the data looks pretty irrefutable to me. There's just no question that complexity peaked in the 1970s and has been declining ever since. And of course, the 1970s, if you know your music history, was the all-time peak of odd time in Western music.

I'm saying Western music specifically in the sense of America and Europe, because of course odd time has a long tradition in other parts of the world, and even in some parts of Europe, for example, in Greece they routinely play in seven. There's one island, the island of Kalamata I believe it is, where the olives come from. They have a dance called the Kalamatianos, and the Kalamatianos is in seven. So if you ever go to a Greek party or Greek wedding, or a Greek festival, you'll see people dancing in seven. And it's a novel experience. You've never seen anything like that before. In the Balkans and in other parts of Eastern Europe, again, odd time is relatively common. And of course, we're not even going to go into India and the Arabic countries, where odd time has thousands and thousands of years of tradition.

But in the West, that was not true. The Western music musical tradition was very strictly organized around four and sometimes three, and that all changed in the late 1960s. So by 1975, when I was a teenager, odd time was absolutely everywhere. It was on the radio. It was on the TV, meaning TV show theme songs, like for example, *Mission Impossible*, that's five. There were so many other examples. It was on Broadway. *Jesus Christ Superstar* was a huge hit, it ran for something like two decades and had enormous cultural influence. More than half of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is in odd time. Big chunks of it are in five, other chunks of it are in seven. And this was not unusual. Most of the bands that I admired and followed during that time, not only routinely wrote in odd time, they switched time during the song.

For example the progressive rock band Yes, was famous for this. If you go back and listen to *Relayer*, the big track from that, it's half the record, is called *The Gates of Delirium*. There are parts of it that even today with all of my musical training, there's parts of it that I find hard to count. I'm really not sure what's exactly happening there. But for sure there are big chunks of it that are in 15. There are big chunks of it that are in 11 and seven and five and so on. And so it was just enormously influential on my musical consciousness. That, and the fact that at that time, though, I didn't realize it, I heard the first examples of *polymeter*, which I'll

define since we'll need this definition a lot. Polymeter is the simultaneous use of multiple time signatures.

And when I say simultaneous, I mean not one after the other, but running concurrently, meaning 5/4 running concurrently with 3/4 running concurrently with 4/4, all running together. The first example of that I'm absolutely certain of was on the very influential album by Yes, called *Fragile*. There's a track called *Long Distance Runaround*, and it unmistakably has polymeter in it. That's very early but there it is. So even though I didn't know what polymeter was when I was a teenager, I was too busy huffing glue or whatever it is that teenagers do, it had an influence on my consciousness. And I feel also that that influence merged with another crucial influence from the art world. So let's not forget that the 1970s were also an enormous peak of creativity in many other cultural areas, including that of art.

So for sure it was the peak of pop art and op art, but it was also the peak of high modern, well, high modern arguably is a little earlier, the mid 1960s, early 1960s, but high modern was definitely still around. And my mother frequently took me to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Not every weekend, but many weekends. And one of the things that I saw there was the work of Thomas Wilfred. So he's unknown to almost everyone who's ever going to read this interview, but he's my greatest hero. He is the patron saint of polymeter, because he did it first. He actually was even more than that. He's more innovative than that. He was arguably the world's first VJ, meaning visual jockey. He probably did the world's first light show. We're talking about 1910, when electricity was still very new.

And this is going to sound crazy, but at the time when electricity first became available in major urban centers, first in places like London and Paris and New York, and then it spread from there, obviously one of the first applications was street lighting. That was one of the main things it was used for. Home lighting took longer, but street lighting is relatively easy to do. But surprisingly, another very rapid expansion of electricity was in theaters. And if you think about it, you'll understand why. Up until the age of electricity, theaters had to light stages. And they did. But I have to tell you that the means they used was not very safe. They used flame, literally. Very powerful flame, because spotlights have to be bright. If you want a powerful spotlight on somebody from a distance, you need a very bright light.

And the only way to do that is by burning something like oil or gas. And so, let's take a step back here. We have a theater that's made of wood, and we've got like a thousand people packed in there, and only a couple of exits, and we're going to light the stage with fire. Does that sound like a good idea? No, it's a horrible idea. And so it led to many terrible accidents and disasters. And so theaters were very keen to avoid this if they could. And as soon as electricity became practicable for them, they adopted it. And they very quickly figured out that with a lot of ambitious machinery that looks ridiculous by today's standards, meaning it looks like something out of the Frankenstein movie, you could actually dim lights. Big things, you see sparks flying and stuff, but they had machines that could dim lights.

And so that was very, very helpful. And then on top of that, they also figured out you could put colored things in front of the lights and make colored lights. Well, so

this was all just in the domain of regular traditional theater. But Thomas Wilfred came along, he saw all this, and he said, wait, I have a better idea, I know what we can do with all this stuff. Let's make a performance just of colored lights, changing brightness. So basically a kind of light show, like something that they would have in the Haight Ashbury, in the 1960s. Except that that's 50 years later. So he thought of it first, and it was popular. People lined up around the block to go see Thomas Wilfred and his color organ. When I say organ, it basically was a ginormous console with these giant rheostats on it.

The kind of thing where you have to grab it with both hands. And he's fading. Bring in some red, bring in some blue. He's improvising, jamming on the thing. And everybody's standing there like they've never seen anything like it before, because they haven't. It was new. And he rode that wave of popularity and became very influential. And he spent the rest of his life—I'm getting to the point of this long story—he spent the rest of his life trying to bring it to the people, because obviously you can only sell so many tickets. So his idea was he was going to build boxes. This is where it gets relevant to my life.

He was going to build these boxes, and inside the box... it kind of looked like a TV, though they didn't exist yet. It was a nice, really well-made wooden cabinet with a kind of opaque glass—meaning glass that's been sanded—on the front, and behind it, there's something you can't see. Maybe you could hear it whirring a little bit. There's something in there. And what you see is these exquisite moving patterns of colored light on the glass. You can't see all the way through, because the glass is partially opaque. And what's inside the box is motors and little lights. Because motors actually existed at this time, even though it's so early. We think motors are a later innovation, but no, in 1910, 1920, they were expensive, but you could get electric motors. So he had electric motors and little reflectors and all this stuff that he made by hand, little pieces of colored glass, and it was all kind of moving around like clockwork.

And all you see is this mysterious pattern of moving light. Well, so those were called *lumia*. These machines are lumia. You can read about them in his Wikipedia page. He's long dead. And so I saw lumia machines in the Museum of Modern Art. And the reason that's important is because Thomas Wilfred's lumia are an early and very concrete example of what I call *phase art*. Meaning art that depends for its existence on the independent motion of several different, periodically repeating things. A thing that's spinning at one rate and a thing that's spinning at a different rate. To make a simple example, if you have a clock with two hands, and one of them is spinning, actually we'll use the regular clock. One of them is the minute hand, the other one is the hour hand.

It's just obviously true that if they start both at noon, over time, they will diverge. They will make a complicated pattern, and they will not actually line back up again until it's noon again. One is going around every hour, and the other is going around every 12 hours. They have two different periods. So we have two things oscillating at two different frequencies. And that makes a complicated pattern. And the more different those frequencies are, like if one is just a simple multiple of the other, it's not very interesting to watch. If you have a thing that's going around once an hour

and you have a thing that's going around every half hour, it's not interesting to watch because after an hour you've seen the whole thing.

But Thomas knew that. And so in his early lumias, you sit in front of the box and after a minute you think, it's doing it again, I've seen the whole pattern. I know this because I saw a retrospective of Thomas Wilfred fairly recently, in 2016 I believe it was at the Smithsonian Gallery in Washington DC. And they somehow managed to resuscitate about 20 of his lumia. I don't know where they got them all, but luckily they were preserved. And you had little benches and little plaques next to them. You could sit on the bench and there'd be a little plaque next to the lumia. Some [of the lumia] were smaller, some were quite big. And on the plaque, it would tell you what the repeat time was. And it became very obvious that over his life, as he experimented further with this medium, he figured out ways to push the repeat time out.

So in the beginning, it was just a minute or 30 seconds, then it became a few hours, then it became a day. By the end of his life, he built a machine that supposedly wouldn't repeat for seven years or something like that. Who knows, right? Who would ever sit in front of it that long? But you know, if Thomas Wilfred said it took seven years, I believe him. Well, so this is incredibly important to me personally, and to my work, because I have pieces of music that won't repeat for millions of years. One of the tracks on *Akoko Ajeji* wouldn't repeat for 1.5 million years. So this is clearly a reference to Thomas Wilfred's work. I'm essentially taking him as an inspiration, using his ideas. Actually, the truth is I hardly knew who he was when I was first exploring polymeter, but somehow he connects to me, he's one of the first people to see this possibility, that we could build long-form patterns just through aggregating oscillators of different frequencies.

Anyway, all a long way to explain that the seventies were a very interesting and active time for experimentation in music. It was basically the period in which classical musicians finally got off the sidelines and entered the rock arena in a big way. Keith Emerson was a highly trained classical musician. Some of the guys in Yes were highly trained. The kind of guys who played in that cheesy pop rock band, Chicago, these were guys who could really play, these were studio musicians. Steely Dan is another great example of this. Steely Dan basically wasn't even a band. They were just a rotating stable of top shelf, top flight studio musicians, the kind of guys who literally can play anything. And so there was an enormous bump in musicianship, in what I call craft, in the mid to late 1970s before the whole thing went belly up with the advent of disco.

And so this is something I talk about a lot. It upsets people. But basically, I've lived through the collapse of everything. I've lived through the rollback of the Great Society. The Post World War II consensus, politically speaking, collapsed during my lifetime, starting with the election of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, the assassination of John Lennon. The whole thing just went down. One by one, the rich people have been recapturing all the branches of government, taking control. And now we're back to where we were before the French Revolution almost. If you listen to Thomas Piketty, it's not quite that bad, but it's getting very serious. It feels like war is coming, and it probably is, and it's a horrible thing. But while that's all been

happening, there's been a parallel collapse in culture. People have been getting dumber.

The popular taste has been declining, and I have the data to prove it. It's not really open for debate. It's obvious to anyone who is older and familiar with the patterns of the older times. It's just clear that the patterns are getting simpler. It's becoming more and more Aldous Huxley. People just want to be anesthetized all day, and the music somehow reflects that. And so there's a great tragedy that I've lived through, and I've tried to change it by introducing more interesting patterns and ideas into electronic music, but I think it's fair to say that I've largely failed at that. And so I have a lot of—I wouldn't say remorse—but I just feel sort of tired. I've tried really hard for 30 years to change this without all that much success, and kind of feel like I've been shouting.

HI: But shouting brilliance. That was such a wonderful bit of insight here. And I guess the question that comes to me—and I love the way that you've framed your own experience and your intimacy with these various sort of collapses—and I'm curious though, why has electronic music been the medium through which you've wanted to explore these ideas?

CK: Easy. It's not that I didn't try other things. So I'm a trained musician. To get to your original question, it's quite normal for people who have innate musical talent to show it at a very early age. As we all know, this happens. I'm not saying that I was a child prodigy, let's not overstate the case. But often, for example, if a child shows a preternatural ability for rhythm, it'll show up as them banging on stuff rhythmically. That's a sign. It's like when a child is scribbling all the time and they make beautiful drawings, you think, maybe we should send this one to art school. Sometimes it happens. Sometimes the child is lucky, sometimes not. So I was not so lucky. I had a wonderful child upbringing in many respects.

My parents were both very brilliant in their own very different ways. And so certainly I was given a good head-start in life in terms of becoming inquisitive and capable of critical thinking, being well-read and well-spoken, and all of those things that mattered to my parents' generation, and probably matter less today. I'm grateful for that, so I don't want to sound ungrateful, is my point. But neither of my parents were at all musically inclined, though, supposedly my mother's mother was, she played the organ supposedly quite well, though I never saw it. I've seen photos of her playing the piano, so I know it's true. But I showed unmistakable rhythmic inclination at a very early age. And unfortunately my mother's response to that was something along the lines of, "stop twitching" and if you keep doing that, we're going to send you to your room.

I was not encouraged in this, but I persisted nonetheless. I would do it in my room, in private. I would attract the amazement and wonder of my classmates as early as the age of whatever age you are in fifth or sixth grade, by beatboxing, before beatboxing was even a word. No one knew what beatboxing was at that time, but I instinctively figured it out for myself. And I would imitate the drumming of many of my favorite drummers, such as Keith Moon from The Who or John Bonham from Led Zeppelin and so on. I would imitate their drum rolls and their drumming just using my mouth. And this is the kind of thing that impresses adolescent boys.

I was pretty unpopular in school. I was a nerd, and I was a sissy, and none of those things made me popular, but my beatboxing was a saving grace. They'd often ask me to do it. And so this all was a sign. I clearly showed a gift, some kind of gift for music, certainly for rhythm. And eventually my mother finally submitted and allowed me to take piano lessons and then eventually, because that didn't work out... They just wanted to make me learn something really stiff and square, like Handel or whatever, and that wasn't working. Learning to read music wasn't the right thing for me. I wanted to rock and roll, you know what I'm saying?

I had a gift for rhythm. I would've made a good drummer and probably could still be. I have been a good drummer. I play the hand drum well. And so they finally just let me have access to a piano. Not at school, but after school. And so I would bang around on that, and that's how I really got started. That led to me having a little cheesy organ in the house, the kind of thing that only has, I don't know, 24 keys or whatever. It makes a kind of wheezing sound. They're very, very cheap. But it was still a big deal for me. And I played it, and I learned a lot from that. And eventually at the age of about 16, I started seriously studying the guitar. I studied the guitar firm seriously, for 25 years at least, closer to 30 really.

And I achieved what we could politely call a semi-pro level as a jazz guitarist. I was good enough to play jazz. I dropped out of the Berklee College of Music. I was too much of a mess to finish the school, but I learned a lot from it. I learned how to read charts. I can read a chart. I certainly know my jazz harmony. And then I had a long series of private instructors after that, including Jerry Bergonzi, who is a very notable music instructor and music performer. He played with John Abercrombie. He was an excellent, excellent tenorist, and he taught every instrument. So I achieved over time a fairly high level of competence in jazz, and eventually switched to piano, which I still play. And also in college, I studied harmony. So I don't come to the electronic music world, as most electronic musicians unfortunately do, ignorant of the basic structures of music.

On the contrary, I have a very deep understanding of the structures of music and have in fact taught music. I taught guitar for a while, mostly to children, but that doesn't matter. And I've taught music theory, usually on a mentoring kind of basis, to other musicians. So that's important. That's a thing that distinguishes me from most electronic dance music producers. But to really answer your question, the real reason that I got into electronic dance music was totally accidental. There's a bunch of weird random life factors at work here. As I said, I started playing guitar in, let's say in 1977, and was playing it very seriously by 1980 certainly, and was still slogging away at trying to become the next John Abercrombie as late as 1991. That's a long time.

That's a long time to be unsuccessful at something. I played in some bands, I'd done some jazz shows and stuff, but nothing ever really clicked. I even had a stint as a street musician, and let me tell you, that's a tough gig. You're competing with the homeless for spare change. None of that went real well. And so I was very discouraged by that point. And I was also discouraged with my job by then. And I was feeling a lot of other strange life pressures. And so at the age of about 30 I basically had a drastic break. I walked away from all of that. I quit the guitar. I moved out of my house, where I was living with all my roommates. I quit my job.

Oh wait, I missed a part of the story. I'm sorry. I left something out. So in October of 1991, we had a Halloween party at my house, as we often did. And I got the idea to dress as a woman. So you knew transgenderism was going to creep in here, crossdressing I should say, because I'm a crossdresser. So I got the idea to dress as a woman. And I don't know how I got it. I really just don't know. It was kind of in the air a little bit in 1991. I might've seen RuPaul, who knows. Certainly I was aware of this famous basketball player whose name I can't think of right now [Dennis Rodman] who'd been known to wear a dress right around then. It'll come to me later. But anyway, somehow or other it came up and I thought, that's what I'm going to be this year, I'm going to be a woman.

Except that it took on a life of its own, and it became a different thing. And by the time the Halloween party actually came, and I came downstairs in my outfit, everybody who saw me that night, it was clear for them that it was more than just a costume, that I was really feeling it. I was in character, I looked like a woman. It was spooky. It spooked the shit out of my friends. And in fact, I lost a lot of my friends right around this time. Most of them. I had some friends who were more supportive of it, including one in particular who was very supportive. And she encouraged me to go to groups, to crossdresser groups and learn more about it, and get involved and find other people who were into this. Because it was becoming a thing.

It was still very dangerous, very edgy. In 1991 you could totally get killed in Boston for cross-dressing, but it was somehow entering the consciousness. And so there were groups around, and I joined one. The Tiffany Club it was called, a very strange experience. We'll get to that later. But through that, I did it more, and I started doing it in public more, and I discovered a whole world that I had no idea existed: the world of gay nightclubs and disco and techno. Because techno was super hot at that moment. I kind of already knew about techno because there was an experimental college radio station [WZBC] that I listened to then. And I had already been moving in the direction of making experimental music, because I was in a band. Boston was a hotbed of experimentation in music in the late 1980s especially.

The movie *American Hardcore*, big chunks of that are set in Massachusetts. Massachusetts had a very strong punk hardcore scene, a very strong experimental and noise music scene. And in the 1980s, and even in the early nineties, there was a tremendous kind of downtown Chinatown punk all-night loft scene, where on the weekend, you could just go from loft party to loft party, and there'd be bands playing, and it was fucking awesome. It was influenced by RISD and Providence, many other things. It was very vibrant. And I became part of that world through this crazy psychedelic Motown reggae hardcore band that I was in, first called the Iron Kilbasa, and then called the Oracles. Never mind, that's a whole other long story. But I was basically doing weird stuff in public already, playing my guitar and doing feedback solos and screaming weird lyrics in a French accent.

You know, weird stuff. And against the background of what was going on in Boston at that time, we weren't even that weird. We would do stuff like throw hotdogs into the audience, and everybody would be like, yeah that's cool, what else you got? We've seen that before. So anyway, we were trying to break through, and I had this feeling of being involved in something bigger. And then I discovered the cross-dressing thing. And so suddenly, holy crap, it's all coming together. There's



electronic music, and there's this, and there's that. And my roommate said to me, why don't you buy a drum machine and start really experimenting with this? Make some electronic music, buy a drum machine. You could buy a 606 for like a hundred bucks or whatever, used from an ad in the newspaper.

So I did that. And it was starting to be some motion. And then—we get to the point of the story—in 1991 in the summer, I heard about a weekend in Provincetown. Provincetown is a famous gay resort on the coast of Massachusetts on Cape Cod. It's at the very end of Cape Cod. Supposedly it was a big pirate town hundreds of years ago, and it kind of feels like that. But you go out there and it's kind of normal during the day, tourists buying tchotchkes, except if you go out on the beaches, you'll see men having sex, but at night, around eight, 9:00 PM the tide changes, and suddenly the normals are all asleep in their hotel rooms, and the wildlife comes out.

Suddenly it's just drag queens everywhere, and there's John Waters standing at the bar of the Crown and Anchor, and you're in a different world. You're in gay land, drag land, female impersonator land. And I got the idea to become a female impersonator. And I did. It's a crazy-ass thing to do, for some white kid from New York to say, I'm going to be a female impersonator. Everyone's like, yeah sure, good luck with that. I actually did it, and I did okay. I never won first prize, but I won second prize once at the A House. That's pretty good, I was making an impression. People knew who I was, and I had a lot of competition, and sometimes they were real assholes too.

I remember one night at the Crown and Anchor, this queen comes up to me and she says to me, why don't you go back to your day job in Boston, bitch? It was really like that. You realize who you're competing against. You're competing against people from the ghetto, no offense, but people who don't have other options in life. It's either succeed at drag or go back to hooking and selling drugs, so it gives the performances an extra edge. So it was like immersion therapy. I had like an immersion event where I was immersed in gay life, in drag life, the kind of life that's depicted in that famous movie, *Paris Is Burning*. I lived that. Those people would come up from New York and hang out with us in Provincetown. And so these three months of my life, after three months, I was done.

I learned a lot. I learned that I'm not gay. Not really. I learned that I don't actually have a future as a female impersonator, but that didn't matter. None of that mattered because by the time the three months were over, my whole worldview was completely changed. I had seen something really special, and I had gone out there asking to see something special. In my mind, I had been sort of praying to be inspired, to have my life changed. My prayers were answered. A month after that, the Church of Euthanasia was already underway. So it was like a month after that that Pastor Kim, the co-founder of the Church of Euthanasia, took me out for dinner at a Thai restaurant, and he said to me, Chris, I think you should start a church. And that's how it started. I mean, big things start small. In the beginning, all we had was the Save the Planet Kill Yourself sticker, and not much else, some ideas.

And we went down to Harvard Square, it was really just me and Kim and a couple of our friends, and we're handing out Save the Planet Kill Yourself stickers. And we had a sign, we were all wearing skull masks. The punks tried to beat us up. We ran

away. It didn't seem like a big thing, but it had legs. It spread. More and more people wanted to come. And before you know it, it got off the ground and it became a zine. And you know the rest, you probably know the whole history of the Church of Euthanasia. It went from nothing to us being on the Jerry Springer show in a matter of just a few years. So big things start small. But anyway, I tell you this whole long, crazy story, just so that you can see the influence of gay culture and the music of that time, which was deep house music, C & C Music Factory and stuff like that.

Black Box was a big influence. That music had an enormous impact on me, because amongst other things, it showed me that I didn't have to be a jazz musician to make music. This is really the point of the story after all, is that I found a way to make music that would reach the people and accomplish what I wanted without having to be one of those jazz performers competing with all the other jazz performers, all trying to do the same thing. And so in this way, I outwitted the great puzzle of my life. Kim had said to me once, he said to me, look, you're making a mistake. You trying to be the next John Abercrombie or whatever it is, it's a mistake. Never stand in someone's shadow. If you stand in someone's shadow, you'll always be compared to them, and probably always unfavorably. It's not a good approach to making art. Instead, you need to find your own way, do the thing, but do it in your own way, so that you're not compared to anyone. And in the end, I found a way to follow his advice. It took a while, and it was really messy, and like I said, I lost almost all my friends doing it, but I made new friends and they were much more interesting anyway.

HI: So that is such a wonderful story, with so many unexpected aspects, it just seems like such a "of the moment" type narrative too, that it seems almost impossible to replicate now. So we've gotten up to 91 and the early nineties here. When do you start taking the ideas that you are developing through the church, and sort of this coming into an environmental consciousness. How do these two things fuse?

CK: How do they merge?

HI: Yeah.

CK: That's really complicated. So the environmental consciousness is actually really old too. You probably know this, but I've lived through a doubling of the human population. I remember a less crowded world, and it was better. It sounds apocryphal and silly, but my favorite example of this is when I was a little kid, sometimes on the weekends, my parents would bust out the old Volkswagen Beetle. Normally you don't need a car in New York City, but on the weekends, once in a while, they would bust it out, and we would drive down to the village to have a hamburger at their favorite hamburger joint, which was down by the west side, down by like 11th Avenue or 12th Avenue or something, way downtown.

And what I remember is that there were no cars on the street. And not only that, but we would park right in front of the door of the restaurant. Right there. There'd be no problem. There's no one, we have the place to ourselves. Just try to imagine that today in the West Village. It's out of the question. It's like a dream from another world. And so this is what it was like, on the weekends, New York was pretty much depopulated back in the 1960s, and that's because the overall population was less.

You just can't double the human population and not expect there to be effects. You can't expect it to not become more crowded. It will. You will feel the pressure. You'll feel like rats in a cage.

And we do. You can see population stress absolutely everywhere. So I was aware of all this from the beginning, and I was aware of climate change long before most people were. I was a very active reader, as I said, I was a nerd in Grace Church School. But I won the book prize, the reading prize every year, so that didn't make me popular with my school mates, but it means that I had to read a hundred books to win that prize. And I did, and I had a very, very high level of comprehension with that. And I also read the newspaper, and one of the things I discovered in the newspaper was there was a *New York Times* story—this would've been about, let's see, early 1970s—there was an article in the *New York Times*, it wasn't the front page, and the headline, I'll never forget, it was, "Scientists Predict Global Warming Irreversible."

This is in the early 1970s. Okay, I saw that. And I'm like, wait, what? Mommy, look at this. She's like, yeah, what do you expect? My mother used to joke, much later in life, that she thought the reason that I'd become such an environmental activist is because when she was pregnant with me, she was reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. How's that for a cocktail tale? Pretty amusing, right? Obviously not actually likely, literally true. But what is true is that she was an enormous influence on me. She's no longer with us, but she is just a tremendous presence in my life. Let's just say she was a supporter of the Church [of Euthanasia]. Let's just leave it at that, a big supporter of the Church.

And she agreed with what I was doing, and she shaped it and influenced it in the sense that as a child, many of her books were books about [environmentalism] that in one way or another, shaped my future development. The best example I can think of offhand is a famous photo essay book called *God's Own Junkyard*. You can find that still on Amazon. And it's all photos of despoiled landscapes in America, despoiled primarily by billboards and advertising, but also by litter. It's incredible to imagine, but when I was a little kid there were not really any laws against littering, because highways were too new. And so the highways were a national disgrace. It was horrifying. You would see literally bags of trash, on both sides of the highway, because people would just toss stuff out of their window, not even think about it.

And it led to a very famous advertising campaign in which Iron Eyes Cody, the native American activist, was featured in a campaign where he's standing in front of a littered highway, and he's got a tear going down his cheek. And this was a very effective campaign. The government paid for it, and it had quite an effect. It helped to shame people, but probably the majority of the effect was accomplished by instituting severe fines for littering, as in \$500 or more. That probably also helped. So there was a real change with this, but when I was a little kid, it was really obvious that the landscape was being despoiled. And of course, much later I would discover that it was being despoiled in much more insidious and frightening ways. I grew up during the time that's described by, I'm trying to think of the name of the book...

There's a wonderful book, I think it's called *Poisoning for Profit*, about how corporations got away with making deals with the Cosa Nostra, with the mafia, to illegally dispose of hazardous waste all over the United States, leading to very famous and horrifying incidents such as the terrifying fire which occurred in New Jersey, in Elizabeth Port, which literally could have killed off the population of New York City. The firemen said about that incident that if the wind had been blowing the other way that day, there would've been mass death, because the mafia just let the toxic waste pile up and pile up and kept saying to the government, you want to tell us what to do? We'll set fire to the waste if you keep fucking with us.

And the government kept putting pressure on them, and they finally said, hey, okay. We set fire to the waste, and then barrels are shooting hundreds of feet into the air. It was like a fireworks display. This was the time when the EPA didn't exist. EPA literally didn't exist until the Nixon administration. It started to exist in 1971, but it didn't really get any serious power until 1980. So I grew up during the time when you really had a feeling like some things had gone out of control, the population was increasing, the cities were getting more and more toxic. The buildings were all covered with black soot, because we still had lead in the gasoline. And so there was this very oppressive kind of feeling that things were going in a horrible direction.

And so all of that influenced the Church of Euthanasia. It's the emerging environmental consciousness that starts at the very beginning. The feeling, I think, is best characterized by a statement that dawned on me at a very early age, possibly partially due to the use of psychedelic drugs. But it dawned on me that humanity was overrunning planet earth, sort of like the inmates taking over the asylum. America is the nation that most symbolizes individualism. So that goes all the way back to the Second World War, the idea of, after the Second World War, reshaping people to pacify them and make them into happy consumers so we don't fight the Second World War again, but this time with the hydrogen bomb. That was a real danger.

That's another thing I grew up with. I did duck and cover drills. Try to imagine that. The hydrogen bomb was a real presence in my life. *Dr. Strangelove* was kind of funny, but kind of not, you know what I mean? Industrial civilization was going to pacify people, make us all into individuals, and of course, now we know it's gone too far. But at the time, it seemed like a good idea. There was good justification for building the interstate highway system, giving everyone a car, at least people who could afford it, and having us all be individual consumers. And this too is part of the tapestry we're weaving, this feeling of individualism gone wrong. But I was aware of that from the beginning. I could feel that everyone had their own justification for dancing their little funky dance and tossing their litter out the window or whatever it is they're doing.

But it's not that they by themselves are intrinsically wrong or a disastrous problem. It's the sum total of all of us making those decisions. That's the problem. And so behind all of that are the giant engines of industry, the giant turbines that are creating all the power from fossil carbon to supply us with all that good stuff. It's not that humans individually are necessarily bad. There are many individual humans that I love who are wonderful people and brilliant and interesting. It's our aggregate

behavior that's the problem. And I was aware of that from the beginning too. And I think the church is really fundamentally an attack on that, if you think about it. Ultimately, the church is an attack on the ugliness of aggregate human behavior.

HI: Sorry, I just wanted to make sure I wrote that down, because that's a great phrasing there. So thinking about these things, you put out the first record in 93, is that right?

CK: No, the first record is 95, and I produced it myself. I'm sorry, you're right, excuse me, I shouldn't be correcting you. You said record, I was thinking of vinyl. I put out a CD in 93 called *Demons In My Head*. It's my environmental ambient, whatever it is. I called it an industrial punishment in D Minor, and that's pretty accurate. It's an interesting piece of music. It actually shows considerable advancement if you listen to it carefully. It's got atonal music on it. Even though I wasn't specifically familiar with atonal music theory the way I am now, I had inclinations about it. I certainly heard it, I knew who Schoenberg was. And so there's some Schoenberg in it.

It's a very ambitious work. We could talk about that another time I guess. I could talk for hours about *Demons In My Head* and how it was made, but *Demons In My Head* proved something to me. Remember, we're talking 1991, 1992. This is really the peak of the zine movement. It's what *Factsheet Five*, the great bible of the zine movement called "high weirdness by mail." I lived that. And so the Church of Euthanasia absolutely surfed the wave of high weirdness by mail. But even before the Church fully existed, I was already using the zine movement somehow to distribute *Demons In My Head*. And there was this idea that in the early days of the zine movement and the peak of post-punk, we were trying to create an alternative culture, outside the dominance of labels and huge magazines and media corporations, where everything is just individual contacts.

You have people you send weird stuff to, and they send you weird stuff. You don't necessarily give them money. Sometimes somebody sends you a few dollars in an envelope, always in cash. Sometimes they just send you some stamps, so you can use the stamps to send them something back. It's a lot of barter. It's very punk. It's very DIY. This was a part of the idiom, the gestalt that *Demons In My Head* and the Church and all of my later works emerged from. It's an underground economy. And that underground economy, by the way, is really gone. It didn't survive in the form that I'm pointing to. You could try to make a case that it transmuted into something else. Except don't forget that if you're going to say it transmuted into Facebook and YouTube and Google and all of that, those are all corporately controlled spaces.

It's a huge difference. And let's not forget that I got a letter from Facebook not that long ago, where they said, it's like this: either you remove every instance of "Save the Planet, Kill Yourself" from the Facebook platforms, or you're done. They can do that. It's against their TOS [Terms of Service]. They make the rules, and they're providing a free service, so you can't ask for your money back. Well, that's a huge thing that's changed in my lifetime, with the advent of social media and the pervasiveness of the internet. But in the 1990s, that hadn't happened yet. In the 1990s it was still mostly just people sticking weird shit in envelopes. And so there was a tremendous amount of freedom, and I really miss that, I have to say. It's off-

topic, but I am a child of the punk years. Even though technically I could maybe be mislabeled a boomer, I feel Gen X.

A hundred percent of my sympathies are with Gen X. I lived a punk life. And so I really miss the freedom of speech that I had, the freedom of speech that made the Church of Euthanasia possible. People often ask me, why do you not do those things that you did? Why haven't there been any Church actions lately? And I say to them, are you crazy? You have no idea how many laws were passed after 9-11 to make stuff like that impossible. Even in progressive liberal Boston, you try and do stuff like a Fetus Barbecue now in Boston, you're done. The police will just show up and say, stop immediately. We're arresting you all for violation of the Homeland Security Act, and you're gone. But that wasn't true in the early nineties. In the early nineties, police absolutely didn't care. Protest just wasn't on their radar at all. They had more serious problems, like people setting fire to buildings. There were a lot of riots in the 1970s. It was super wild.

HI: This sort of describes the part I'm trying to get my head around still, Boston. I can see this sort of very post-punk culture that you're describing, and this sort of zine milieu or some like something like that, right?

CK: And goth and industrial, and don't forget the SubGenius, right? The Church of the SubGenius was an early competitor for the Church of Euthanasia. They were also supplying weird stuff, but they weren't necessarily off-brand for us. In fact, very quickly we merged with them and we would start to gain some of their support. Some of the people who liked the Church of SubGenius stuff also were fans of the Church of Euthanasia, because it counted as slack. I got to meet many of the priests of the SubGenius religion. So there was a lot of feeling... I guess what I mean to say is that the 1990s had a much higher degree of solidarity and social cohesion than you might expect. That by today's standards, where everybody's just in their cell, updating their profile and pimping themselves for likes, it wasn't like that.

There was a feeling more of building solidarity in the real world, where you actually meet the people, and you know them, and they're actual flesh and blood people and you do stuff with them in the real world. That's key to understanding how the Church of Euthanasia got going, and also how my music career got going. I was doing real things in the real world with people. That's after all how Gigolo discovered me. If I had not actually gone to the trouble to press my own vinyl at great expense, and then drag it back from the pressing plant, some garage in Brooklyn, and send it to people, and then pack it all in boxes and give it away and send it to DJ pools, it would never have made it to that record shop where DJ Hell discovered it.

So in other words, there was a premium on doing actual things in the real world. Whereas today, as things become more and more virtual, that's no longer the case. Increasingly today, action is occurring in this kind of padded global cell, this global pleasure prison of the social media networks and all of their various associated dungeons. There's Second Life and there's all the things that are like Second Life, and Minecraft and online gaming and all of this. I'm not saying any of this is necessarily wrong, I'm just saying that it's very different from the kind of physical, real world solidarity that was common in punk circles as recently as the 1990s.

And when I first came to Berlin in 1998, the wall had only been down for nine years, and big chunks of East Berlin still looked more or less like they had looked in 1945. The DDR didn't have any money to fix the buildings, and West Berlin hadn't gotten around to it either, and so you better believe it was sketchy and it was as punk as you please. There was squatting everywhere, and there was a feeling that you were part of something big that involved real people doing weird stuff that the government didn't necessarily need to know about and probably wouldn't like if they did. And that I think is the connection between all these things.

HI: Okay, so DJ Hell represses the record. And do you then move to Berlin in 98?

CK: I couldn't manage it. I didn't have the guts for it and I just couldn't get it to work. You have to remember—I'm not complaining—most of my friends back in Boston, they were all in bands, and none of them amounted to anything. They worked at it for years, sometimes decades, and got very little out of it. The typical deal is you go and play in some bar and you get enough money to buy a couple of six packs of beer, and then the drummer drinks it all. Welcome to my world. That's what being in a rock band is like. I mean an unsuccessful one.

There's super successful ones who blow up and become a big deal for a microsecond or two, but for most bands it's just the endless parade of failure. And I did better than that, a lot better than that. My metric is when somebody else is paying to manufacture the product, you won. That's the best you're going to do. But if you expect to live off it, then you're really asking a lot. I know very few electronic musicians, even in the Gigolo days, who were able to just quit their jobs and do nothing else. That was rare. There were a few. I'm not saying that Jeff Mills had to have a day job. He probably didn't. Good for him. Maybe Anthony Shake Shakir also was able to make a living from it, but just barely, and not a particularly glamorous living either. And that means DJing all weekend, every weekend. You understand?

That's where the money was, even back then. The money didn't come from selling records. And this is at a time when even a relatively minor artist like me could sell 10,000 records. Basically at Gigolo, if you didn't sell 10,000 records, they'd boot you off the label. That was not a lot of records. A lot of records was 20,000 or 30,000, which is just inconceivable by today's standards. The point is that it wasn't a reasonable ambition for me to just move to Germany and make my living as an artist, first of all because I'm not a DJ, and that was the only way there was any real money in it. To make a living as a live performer was almost unheard of at that time. Very few people managed it. Maybe Miss Kitten and the Hacker managed it, but even they DJ'ed a lot, you know what I'm saying?

So it wasn't that easy a proposition, and that's a big part of the reason why I stopped doing it in 2003. Even though I achieved a huge degree of notoriety and sold a ton of records, the bottom line was I couldn't pay my rent. I had to go get a job. This is by the way normal. My favorite example is the great American author who wrote—it's going to drive me crazy now, help me here—he wrote *The Sound and the Fury*. William Faulkner. William Faulkner is one of America's most important authors of all time, and he worked in a factory. He worked in an electrical generating station. He would work there and then he'd go home and he'd work on his books.

It's not so unusual. I don't feel that you have anything to complain about if you have to get a day job to support your art. I never met an actor who didn't, at the beginning, at least, it's just sort of part of life. I expect my art to cost money, and I haven't been disappointed. I can tell you that it's cost me a fortune. I'm sure that I put in countless thousands. I can tell you for sure that the Church of Euthanasia easily made a hundred thousand dollars in donations during its existence, if you count all the merchandise, bumper stickers and t-shirts and stuff. We were 501(c)(3), we were allowed to make that money, but you better believe it did not go to buy me a fancy car or anything like that.

It all went into art. Every last dollar of it. And then some, you know, I was routinely emptying out my bank account to pay for bigger and more exciting and more interesting and more complex stunts. Because that's what we were. Essentially the Church of Euthanasia was like a theatrical company. At the peak of the street actions period, we had probably 20 reliable players, of which five could really be counted on to do the super dangerous stuff. We had a couple of guys who were the commandos. There's one guy in particular, James Brett, he always volunteered for the most dangerous job. It was kind of a point of pride for him. He wanted to do the thing that no one else wanted to do.

So we had a couple of guys like that. And we had a larger group of kind of hangers-on, some of whom could be counted on to maybe hold a sign, some of whom just came along to watch, or maybe they might take pictures and so on. It's like anything else, there's degrees of participation. But on any given day, I could send out... We had a kind of secret email channel on the internet. You had to know about it to be on it. And we would send out the bat-phone signal, dada action at such and such a time, be there or be square, exact time, this is what you have to bring, this is what you have to do. Not that different than the Suicide Club in San Francisco, John Law's thing which eventually led to Burning Man, it was a little like that.

We had to keep it secret because we didn't want anyone to know what we were going to do, because if they did, they would've stopped us, right? It's simple. So we'd send out the code and then hopefully 20 people show up, and we've got enough people to do the thing. So it was really this feeling of, you just never knew what was next, but for sure it costs money. So I don't feel bad about having lost money on all of this. I consider that a point of pride. That means I was trying! You have to put effort into it. You have to believe in your work. If you are stingy with your art, then what kind of person are you? It's the one thing you shouldn't be stingy on, you should be generous.

I give this talk about art recently, I gave it in Berlin here before, I gave it in France, sorry, Switzerland, I gave it in Geneva, the essence of the talk... It's called "Why do I make art?" It's all advice for artists, and it's full of counterintuitive stuff. Things like, don't spend any time on publicity. It's a waste of time. You should always outsource that, because that's time that you could have spent making art, which is the thing that only you can do. It's things like that. So people found it very interesting. But there's this idea that your art is your children, and who is stingy with their children?



My works, these are my children. I want them to thrive. I spoil them. I want them to have everything. I want them to go to Oxford. All I'm trying to say is that it's not surprising that I wasn't able to really make a living as a Gigolo. What's actually surprising is, if you think about how extreme I was and how far out I was, what's surprising is that Gigolo gave me a platform. And the reason for that is actually hidden. If you look closely, if you read the Wikipedia page on Electroclash, what you'll discover... I'm one of the founders of Electroclash. It's me and Hell and Miss Kitten and the Hacker and a few other people. And one of the key things that Hell...

Hell gets some credit here, he saw something, he saw something quite brilliant. He grew up during the time of the white labels, when almost all electronic music artists were anonymous. You didn't know who the artist was, and that was sort of a point of pride. No one cares. They're all white labels. Maybe something scribbled on it with a Sharpie, but that's it. No covers, nothing. But Hell saw that people were getting tired of this, that there was a thing missing, and it wasn't just that the music was boring, though there was that. But what was really missing is the element of glam, of celebrity, of there being something to see, something to watch, of being entertained. And so his idea was, he was going to bring personalities back into the electronic music business.

And he did that, and so that's why he wanted me, because I was a larger than life personality. I could definitely hold an audience. The first time I performed for Hell was at Popkomm in Cologne. And the Gigolos said to me, so what do you need for your show? You need a mixer, some turntables, what? And I'm like, what are you talking about, mixer, turntable? I don't do that, I don't even own any records. I said to them, I want a really big guitar amp, the biggest one you can find. Huge. And I want a microphone. And they're like, okay, that's a pretty weird request, but we'll see what we can do. And so I got off the plane, I marched down this parade of broken glass. Popkomm was a festival, there were a million drunks lying on the street, broken glass everywhere.

We get to the place where the event is, and there's a big stage with this giant guitar amp. And I brought my guitar with me, and I plugged it in, and then I started haranguing the crowd. I started giving a Church a Euthanasia sermon, in English. Germans mostly speak some English, but still, it was pretty off-putting. People started heckling me and throwing stuff and shouting. It was a Dada event, it really was. And then when people had finally had enough, I twanged my guitar and I launched into a guitar and vocals only version of *Save the Planet, Kill Yourself*, and the crowd went fucking wild. There's people who still talk about it today, they'd never seen anything like it. And Hell was totally happy. He was like, that was great, that was just what I wanted. He was that kind of guy, he was also a punk. He's the same age as me. He's also from this time and has very similar influences. So I think that will help to answer your question, to see this.

HI: One hundred percent. And I love that story. But you do stop releasing records for a while, right?

CK: Not strictly. I released some, I feel, important ambient works during that period, that supposed hiatus, let's call it the hiatus. I released *Al Fasawz* and *I'll Just Die If I Don't Get This Recipe* and *Plasmagon* during this hiatus. And not only that, but I

also developed the EKTA project during this time, which started out as helping my girlfriend at the time with her final project for art school. What it was, was an EEG-controlled algorithmic music and visual generator. So you could wear an EEG [headband], and depending on your level of excitement, the generated music and visuals would respond to you, creating feedback.

So it would amplify your state. If you were relaxed, it would become relaxed too, and so you would become more relaxed. Or if you became excited, it would become excited too, and amplify that. This was very innovative for that time. It was cutting-edge technology, and it had influence. A lot of people saw it. We showed it a number of times in Boston, and it got talked about some. That's the EKTA project. So I was involved in a lot of creative work at this time. I just wasn't releasing dance music records, and I wasn't doing shows anymore, partly because I needed to focus on other things to make a living. During this period, I spent 18 years working in the 3D-printing industry. I've had a 35 year career as a software developer, and by the end, a high-level software developer, a consultant.

I was a consultant for 20 years. My specialty is parallel processing and protocol design. I've done robotics, I've done all kinds of things. I've done a lot of stuff that interfaces with hardware. Like firmware design, where you're on the edge, you're working with electrical engineers every day. I'm not claiming to be an electrical engineer, but I've worked with electrical engineers and with scientists routinely in my career. And so those years that we're calling the hiatus, I was working for Z Corporation first. I worked for them for 15 years. And with them, I helped develop the world's first full-color 3D printer, which was an astonishing thing to be part of. By the end, it got so good. The machines got better and better.

There was a whole series of them, and I developed first the desktop software, and then later also the firmware for them. It was a full-time thing. If you've ever seen the Mike Judge TV show *Silicon Valley*, I lived that. It was a startup. I slept in my cubicle. We lived on pizza and coffee. It was just like *Silicon Valley*. The same kinds of maniacal characters came through, the guys who owned the companies, these angel investors. I've seen all of that, but it was a wonderful, wonderful thing. Towards the end, it got so good that if we had a 3D scan of you, we could make a doll that looked just like you. It was freaky.

HI: It's funny you mentioned that. My family for some reason, one year, we all got each other 3D prints of one another.

CK: Yeah. It's a thing you can do in the mall, right?

HI: Yeah.

CK: But believe me, when I started in 1999, this was just not the case. Nobody had seen anything like this before. And some of the early adopters were all shoe corporations, which is interesting. The reason shoe corporations and car companies wanted this technology is because anybody doing large-scale injection molding of plastic was interested in this. Because the problem is, you can't do a small injection molding run. There is no such thing. When you're injection molding, you're making a million of whatever it is. And so it better be the right size and it better be exactly what you want. Because you can't say later, could you do it again?

So they were very interested in what are called concept models, where the idea is that you make a model of it and everybody in the boardroom looks at it and signs off on it and says, yes, this is exactly what we want. So the model better be really similar to what you're going to get, and it better have the right colors too. And that's where we came in, because we could make these color models. That was our advantage. So anyway, this chewed up 15 years of my life. And then the last three years after that before my reemergence, so to speak, the company got bought out. Z Corp got bought out by an evil company. And so the founder of Z Corp, who also was a very important member of the Church of Euthanasia, James Brett, the guy who took [on] all the most dangerous duties, he's also a genius.

An MIT guy. He founded Z Corporation. Then he left, he took his money and he left. And he started a new company that was going to make large format stuff, large format 3D printing. So here's how that works. We're going to make stuff the size of a refrigerator, so then there's no more printer. It's too big for that. Instead we just have a giant robot arm. And the print head is on the end of the arm. And we program the robot to make print passes over and over, layer by layer, over 24 hours or whatever. It builds up this ginormous thing on a pallet, so that later we can move it. Because it's on a pallet, right? If you build it on the floor, you would have a hard time moving it afterwards.

Brilliant idea. It took forever to get it working. I spent three years on it, and it was finally working by the time I left. Very crazy though. Very dangerous. I was terrified the whole time. Because this robot arm, it's the kind of robot you see in advertisements for car companies. If this robot arm is mis-programmed, it could literally throw you across the room like a football, and it has no idea that you're there. It's not sentient or anything. It's just a robot arm. So very dangerous. Very stressful. I was glad to get out of there. So I had all that going on, and while I was doing that, I was learning all the skills that I would actually need for my reemergence, because there's a crucial part of the story that's missing, which I'll just quickly fill in, which is that another reason...

It wasn't just that I got tired of stupid smiles and autographs, although I did, that was certainly a factor, hanging around in scuzzy techno clubs in the middle of the night gets old after you've done it for five or six years, it can get old, that was a factor. And the lack of money was a factor. And also, don't forget that EFA went bankrupt. That was a factor. Gigolo went down because EFA went down. And *The Man of the Future*, which was my second album, was basically botched because of that. A lot of the copies wound up destroyed because of failed consignment deals, because the largest [electronic] music distributor in Europe [EFA] collapsed. So there were a lot of factors, and it's not just one thing, but a key factor that's missing from all that is that I had become frustrated with my software development tools for making music. So of course, we have to back up a step.

Right from the very beginning, not from *Save the Planet, Kill Yourself*, but certainly from shortly after that, I was developing my own custom software to compose music with, because I was onto complex polymeter from the very beginning, and you can't do that with normal music production tools. It's just not a thing. There is no way. Most music production tools don't support it, or they support it so horribly in such a stupid way that it's not worth the bother. So even on the *Six Billion*

*Humans Can't Be Wrong* album, there's complex polymeter all over the place. Go back and listen to *Buy*, the first track. *Buy* is definitely in three and four and five and seven, and 11 and 13 all at the same time. In fact, it's more drastic than that. The high hat part is literally in three different times. The closed hat is in one time signature, the medium hat is in another time signature and the open hat is in still another time signature. So in the beginning I had this kind of baroque explosion where I discovered that I could juxtapose odd time signatures.

They have to be prime, of course, in order for you to get full phase shifting behavior, they've got to be relatively prime. The mathematicians will appreciate that, but it doesn't matter right now. The point is that when I discovered this, I had the reaction that any person would have when they discover something new. I want to use it all the time. I used it really aggressively. And so to my ear, now, 30 years later, my early compositions sound a little over the top. When I go back and I listen to *Buy*, I think, wow, I really threw in everything and the kitchen sink too. It's a bit much in places, a little too relentless.

And so over the years, I developed methods for taming the inherent relentlessness of polymeter juxtaposition, but I encountered a limit. By 2001, 2002, I had encountered a limit. And the limit was that I was developing all my software under DOS. Remember MS-DOS, this is very primitive technology by today's standards. Remember 64K and stuff like that. I literally just didn't have enough memory to do the things I wanted to do. And computers were just too slow to do the things that I wanted to do. And so development kind of ground to a halt. And I knew that in order to really get over these technological limitations, I would have to learn to use a modern operating system. Because by this point Windows 2000 exists, but I don't know how to program for it. It's not like you can just suddenly become a Windows programmer.

That's a really high bar. That's actually really difficult. It can take years to become a competent Windows programmer. And so there was no easy path. So one of the fortuitous things about me having taken that job for Z Corporation was one of the first things they asked me to do was learn Windows. Boom. And so within a year, I had already written my first open source software. I wrote a wonderful program called Mixere which was sort of like having an unlimited number of cassette decks, each one of which could be loaded with one wave file. And every [deck] had its own independent transport controls plus pitch and other things. And so you could basically configure them all to play some crazy sound collage. Well, that was super convenient because, let's see, this was 1999, 2000.

That was definitely the peak of sound collage. The college radio station, WZBC, that I was involved with, they were playing sound collage every day, every weeknight from like 9:00 PM until whenever the DJs got tired. It was all Soviet France and stuff like that. And so I was fitting in perfectly with that. I started doing live sound collage, and that's how I wound up making *I'll Just Die If I Don't Get This Recipe*. I used to do, let's call it an irregular night at ZBC. I would get invited as a sub if the regular DJ couldn't make it. And I would bring my laptop and my little hard drive loaded up with clips from all of my favorite movies, which I'd carefully edit. And then I would start jamming with them.

And I'm not saying I invented this, I stole this idea blatantly from my favorite WZBC DJ. It was a guy named Gary Geiserman. I don't even know if Gary Geiserman is still around, but he would show up at WZBC. He was the crank of the station. Everyone hated him because he was constantly violating the standards on profanity and playing Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and stuff, which you're not allowed to do with FCC regulations. He would do it anyway. They finally booted him off the air. But he would show up at the station with suitcases filled with cassette tapes, literally suitcases, and amazingly, he knew what was on all these tapes. And he would start doing this crazy improvisation and he would start layering and layering and layering until he had so many things going, 5, 6, 7 layers going, all somehow weirdly related.

He was an inspiration to me. And right around that time was when Orb became hugely famous and popular, and they were doing this too. If you go back and listen to Orb's albums from the late 1990s, there's a sample in one of those tracks where they say, "layering different sounds, that's what we do." They do it in an English accent. It's more charming, layering different sounds, that's what we do. And this was the moment for that. Let's layer different sounds. And so I got really into it, and I developed the software tool for it, and that's what led to *I'll Just Die If I Don't Get This Recipe*. I'm telling you this story just so you can understand that this was not a fallow period, creatively.

This was in fact the period during which I really expanded myself out of the kind of narrow shoes that I was in, where I had been an electro artist and electronic live electronic music performer, and the Church of Euthanasia, and that was it. I suddenly saw the opportunities to move into many other things that are still bearing fruit today. I moved into visual art. I became a VJ for a while and VJ'ed at clubs. I had written my own VJ software from scratch, another learning project. And so through that I began to develop all kinds of other tentacles and branches and became a richer, fuller artist. And so I feel that this period is so important and it's misunderstood. People think of it as a fallow period, but it really wasn't. It's what made my current burst of creativity possible.

HI: So let's talk about the reemergence then. So you do the boiler room in 2019. Is that right? And does this feel like your coming out party?

CK: Well, yeah, but only from an external point of view. From an internal point of view, the sprouting was well before that. The sprouting started in 2016 after my mother passed away. That had a big shock. I had to spend a year of my life—with all respect—cleaning up my mother's life. I'm the only child. My father and my mother split in 1976 or something, so that wasn't going to be his job. There was only really one person who could do it. Also I should point out that my mother passed away in the apartment that I grew up in, so to say that it was very personal is understating it. She still had a lot of my stuff actually. And a lot of it was hidden.

So there were many surprises, she was kind of a hoarder. But that's very common of the depression era, many of the depression era people became hoarders, understandably, considering the experience that they had as children. If you were born in the 1930s, you experienced deprivation and privation on a scale that's hard for us to imagine. Bread lines, rationing, all of that stuff. And so it's understandable that she would feather her nest pretty well, and she did. And so it took a lot of

energy and time to sort all that out, and in the process, I kind of came to a realization. I felt the feeling of the sand going through the hourglass, if you will.

And I thought to myself, well, I suppose all throughout history, everyone has thought this. When one of your parents dies, you think, I'm next. And that's true, by and large. Of course, there are exceptions, but by and large, that's true. And so I thought, you know what? It's time for me to take a stand and devote the rest of my life to art, and I'm going to make that possible. By then, I'd accumulated enough savings, I'd squirreled away enough nuts from my 35 year career as a software designer. [checks years with calculator] By then, I figured I had a shot at being able to make this work. After all that time, I was still kind of living like a college student, just to be clear. I rented a room in a big house. I had seven roommates or something. And my furniture mostly was milk crates. I slept on a mattress on the floor. I don't have expensive taste, so it looked doable to me, and I thought, all right, let's make a stand. It's time to stop talking about the Polymeter MIDI Sequencer. It's time to sit down and actually do it. Talking about it is cheap, but doing it, that's the thing.

And by that point, I no longer really had any excuses. I had the time to do it. I had the skill and the knowledge to do it. And so I just thought, let's get serious now. Because by then, I'd already released four or five major open source softwares, so I had a really solid grasp of the fundamentals of Windows programming, both the UI and the multi-processing stuff, the thread space stuff. So I was ready to do it. And so I did it. And it's fair to say that *Akoko Ajeji*, my comeback album, evolved out of that. Each track on the album reflects a new feature being added to the software. It was like that. If you played it in the order that it was written, it would be a weird musical history of the evolution of the modern Polymeter MIDI Sequencer, which has many features that the original did not have.

It has all the features that the original had, pretty much, and hopefully none of the bugs and, and none of the limitations, but many other features, new features. In fact they were still being added years later, new degrees of freedom that I hadn't imagined when I first came up with the polymeter sequencer, because they just weren't possible, so it wasn't worth worrying about them. But they proved to be very important, and they led to a whole new class of music, especially my classical music, which didn't get much recognition so far, but I have to tell you, *Passion for Numbers* is a truly radical album. Whether people like it is a separate question, but it is structurally extremely radical.

HI: And so how do you, how do you go about finding, I mean it's a different type of audience that seems to be engaging with your music. How do you connect with Perlon?

CK: It's not so different. I'm always struck by how little DJ life has changed. In fact, I'm primarily struck by the opposite. I'm struck by how nostalgic and backwards-looking the DJ pyramid is. I call it that after this essay that I wrote for *Ransom Note*, The DJ Pyramid, this incendiary essay which no doubt made me many enemies in the music world, specifically in the minimal techno world. But the DJ pyramid seems to me an apt metaphor. And we're not going to name names. There's no need to. I think somewhere in there I said certain people are making boatloads of money from

the DJ pyramid, and they're probably not going to enjoy reading this essay. That's probably true. It's a critique.

I feel that in many respects, the electronic dance music world is extremely conformist and closely tied to neoliberalism, to neoliberal capitalism. It's a form of standardization of markets. People are normally aware by now that the only legal obligation of a corporation is to return a profit for its shareholders. That news has mostly penetrated to the average person, but it's not so obvious, and it's less commonly recognized that the most efficient and rapid way to achieve that goal is by standardizing consumption. George Lucas was absolutely right to draw attention to this in his classic film, *THX 1138*. One of the little infomercial breaks in *THX 1138* was "for more enjoyment and greater efficiency, consumption is being standardized." That was one of the Church of Euthanasia quotes. We used that in our propaganda.

So George Lucas knew about this back in the day, and it's just true. The way you generate profits is by standardizing consumption, because if everyone wants the same thing, or a relatively trivial variation on the same thing, it's much easier to automate and mass manufacture whatever that is. That's just obvious. To the extent that everywhere across the world, everybody listens to really similar music and takes the same drugs and wears the same kind of clothes and acts the same way, that's great for capitalism, that's optimal. In fact that's exactly the conditions in which capitalism thrives. And so I associate especially the modern form of electronic dance music with this kind of standardization and homogenization of culture. And as I said, that view has made me many enemies, but I feel that I've arrived at an age where I don't worry about people disagreeing with me that much anymore.

It's not really a problem. People disagreed with me back then too. I've been accused of way worse things than having unconscionable opinions about electronic music. That's sort of at the bottom of my list of crimes, if you want to put it that way, right? Remember, we're talking about a person who made a 9-11 music video. Much worse things have happened. But I feel that I'm justified in saying this because I lived through a much different period of electronic music. In the early 1990s, when DJ Hell was coming up, it's fair to say that the electronic music scene was a lot more diverse. I'm not saying that everybody was writing in complex polymeter. That's not true. I'm almost certainly the pioneer of that, and that's fine.

But there were a lot more rhythms going on. Drum and bass was big, breakbeat was happening. The super-fast crazy rave music was happening in the Scandinavian countries. There was jungle going on, and just all kinds of things were happening. It was very rhythmically and musically diverse. And frankly, in terms of house music, it was still really common for actual musicians to be involved. So back in 1991, if you wanted to make a house record, you had to hire actual musicians. Who else was going to play those piano parts? There's no algorithm for that. You need a guy who knows how to play the piano really well to do that. It's not programming. You need a guy to sit down and just play that. And then you also need a gospel singer. Those don't grow on trees either, so it's still more closely connected to the root of disco music.

The early disco music was done with orchestras. I always feel like it seems so obvious to me, but that's because I'm old. If you really want to see what disco looked like, go back and watch *Saturday Night Fever* again and look at those dance moves. And it wasn't just pair dancing, it wasn't just John Travolta and Olivia Newton John [actually Karen Lynn Gorney]. No. There's scenes where they showed a whole crowd all doing the same move. And so there's a connection between that and the much older culture that John Waters is showing in his film about Baltimore dance culture, *Hairspray*. Look at the dancing in that, like the Madison, for example.

If you go to dance the Madison, you better practice, babe. You better know what the fuck you're doing. If you're in with a crowd and you're doing the Madison and the guy says, do a Wilt Chamberlain layup, and you're like, what's that? You're not going to be dancing with those guys again. They're going to boot you right out. The point is that it's social dancing, which means that success is not judged by the success of the individual, it's judged by the success of the group. And this ties us to a much larger critical theme in my work, which is the critique of the collapse of solidarity in Western civilization, and the collapse of not just Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, but the collapse of the whole post World War II consensus.

You could connect it to the collapse of the Soviet Union as well, and you wouldn't be wrong. Not that I'm a communist, by any means, I'm not. But you could make a case that the period I've lived through—I call it the Age of Rollback—all of the great social web connections have been rolled back systematically, because they inconvenience the super wealthy. It's all very literal in the end. It's all about money. Sometimes I ask people, what do you think the top nominal tax rate ever achieved in America was? I'll ask you that question. What do you think the highest tax rate that historically ever existed in America was?

HI: It's got to be like 60, 70 percent maybe.

CK: 94.

HI: Okay. Wow.

CK: Yeah. In 1946, the top nominal tax rate was 94 percent. I think it was on everything over a million dollars. It might've been much lower. It might've been a few hundred thousand dollars, because that was a million dollars back then. [The year was actually 1944, and the 94% tax applied to income over \$200,000 which would be 3.3 million in 2023 dollars. The top tax rate was reduced to 91% in 1945 where it remained until 1964.]

So the idea was basically above a certain threshold, the government takes it all. Now, why would they do that? And why would anyone submit to that? You could say, okay, they needed to pay for rebuilding Europe, but that's not really the point. They did it in Britain too. The reason they did it is because there was a deliberate effort to suppress oligarchy, because there was a feeling—justified I think, and I'm sure Thomas Piketty would agree—there was a feeling that oligarchy led to World War I and then World War II in short order, that it was no longer practical to allow such corrosive concentration of wealth and such desperate poverty around that, and that it was necessary to redistribute wealth, for governments to actually get involved in redistributing wealth, and that's how come so many of the GIs who



fought in the war came back to America and got free houses and got to go to college for free.

There was a tremendous spasm of largesse, if you want to put it that way. And the United Nations is just a symbol of that. The whole high modern period is a symbol of this idea that government is suddenly going to take an interest in people's lives and try and help people thrive, because it's actually a good thing if there's more social cohesion, and there's more equality between classes and less separation, less concentration of wealth, then we're less likely to have the conditions of failure, of real deep societal failure and miseducation and social degradation that lead to war. Because if you look at the history of how the first and second world wars got started, it's clear that poverty was a huge factor in those wars.

This is something that's really changed during my lifetime, and I've been critiquing it all along. I've been saying, look, we had the right idea. We were on the right path. And then... Piketty says this was inevitable, and maybe he's right. I'm not an economist. I submit to his superior judgment on this matter. His point is that the high modern period, we thought it was going to continue forever and just get better and better. But from his longer view, the high modern period was just a bubble, and now we're back to the default rule that's persisted throughout all of the history of civilization, which in his view is that the rich get richer. But that's horrible. That's a great disaster. And that's what I was explicitly critiquing on *Apologize to the Future*.

The first line of *Exit Game* is what? Rich people are dumb. I hope they succumb, in expensive cars and condos on Mars. There's a lot of hostility towards the wealthy, and even more so on *Not My Problem, I'll Be Dead*, which is really about them. I've been expressing this consistently in my work, this idea that we've really lost the thread here, that it's starting to look like we fought the first and second world wars for nothing. And that's a scandal, because that's arguably the most dramatic history that's ever occurred for humanity. Younger people don't get it. They didn't live through it. But my godmother's relatives died in the Holocaust. My father was evacuated, because he was a child, from London during the Blitz. World War II was not some kind of archaic thing, like the neolithic or something, to me.

I remember what a world that had more solidarity looked like. When I grew up in New York City, most people had ordinary apartments, ordinary appliances. It looked a lot like that American TV show, *The Honeymooners*, if you can imagine that. It wasn't the 1950s quite, there was something new happening, but there was still a lot of... Let's just say the middle class was a lot bigger and there was no shame in being middle class. In fact, there was pride in being middle class and that world has disappeared. And so that's a lot of what I've been criticizing.

HI: That's wonderful, and that's such a helpful articulation of so many of these concerns. And I'm curious then, my question, on the one hand is, you're describing, I think, accurately a homogenization of dance music culture, and offering a critique of that. So I hear that and, and I'm curious about a, how you see your music perhaps interrupting that, and b, sort of a second part to this is that—whether the material conditions are actually true, whether, it's actually reflective of material reality, I'm not so sure, and I'm curious to hear your point—but there is now more of a conversation around dance music and politics. And people thinking about politics,

thinking about solidarity, thinking about identity that comes from that. And I'm curious, if you see that another facet of neoliberalism, sort of co-opting politics, or whether you see dance music as becoming more politicized now.

CK: Well, I have to be very careful here, because I've already made so many enemies already. I don't think it's constructive for me to give everyone a bloody nose over something that's not really their fault. I think that the societal currents that are causing homogenization of culture are immensely powerful, and are far beyond the control of individuals. I think individuals can resist it to some extent, but Meta is too big. It's not practical to resist corporations of this size. Google, if you view it as an economy, has a GDP much larger than many nations. I think we're up against vast forces that were essentially unimaginable even 15 years ago. So I don't blame people for just doing the best they can and trying to adapt to this new world that the internet has created, for all of its faults.

But I do think though, that there's some careful distinctions that we're overlooking here. I'm anti-solipsism. I'm anti-unicorn. I don't think that it's a good thing for humanity to get the idea that reality is just whatever you say. I come from a hard science, engineering background. I understand what reality is, and I understand what science's role is in explicating that. I give a whole talk just about that. That's what's summarized on the *Apologize to the Future* album, in the song, *A Thin Layer of Oily Rock*. I'm a scientific pragmatist. Scientific pragmatism is the idea that our explanations of phenomena will always be imperfect, but they can be improved, and they have been improved greatly, and they will continue to improve as long as civilization remains sufficiently organized. By now, our explanations of phenomena are quite extraordinarily accurate, accurate enough to make cell phones that contain parts which are literally just a few nanometers wide, a few billionths of a meter.

Very impressive. That's a lot of progress. A lot of it occurred just during my lifetime too. When I was a little kid, integrated circuits were just becoming a thing. Transistors were still the norm. When I was a really little kid, integrated circuits hadn't really happened yet. So in one lifetime, we went from discrete transistors to the iPhone. There's been tremendous technological progress, but there's also been tremendous social progress. When I was a little kid, racism was absolutely endemic in the United States, even in progressive liberal cities like Boston. Gay people were completely closeted. Most people who knew the band Queen literally didn't even know that Freddie Mercury was gay. Most people didn't know that Elton John was gay. In fact, he did everything he could to conceal it. He even tried to get married to a woman.

Freddie Mercury did something similar, as we now know. It was a different world, socially. So there's been a lot of progress, and I'm not taking away from that. I recognize that we've been struggling to overcome many of our handicaps, but that does not give us license to escape into solipsism. Solipsism fundamentally is the philosophy that each individual makes their own reality, and I'm saying that that's a part of the problem with neoliberalism, is that it encourages this. The internet encourages this. Gaming and social media encourage us all to make our own rules, to become detached from reality, and drift off into virtual space, like *The Matrix*,

where we're all in our little pods and we can think whatever we like, because what we're actually doing is lying in a vat of goo.

I don't think that's constructive, I think that's a disaster, and I think that if we continue down the road of solipsism, then we'll never solve climate change. In order to solve climate change, we'll need solidarity. We'll need the one thing that we can't seem to manage to do, which is to actually agree, and we'll need to agree about something super important. We'll need to agree about what the goal is. And not only that, but the goal had better be humanity becoming a long-lived species, because otherwise we won't become one. We just won't be around. That's the reality. I'm sorry to put it in such stark terms, but it's really as simple as that. We're having a reality moment.

It's a little like that moment in *Blade Runner* where [Leon] says to Harrison Ford's character, as he's beating him up, he says, wake up, time to die! It's just like that. If we don't snap out of it real soon and change human structures drastically—curtail our consumption, curtail our population, stop burning fossil carbon—if all those things don't happen almost immediately, then you can expect real damage, meaning we're going to spend the next hundred years moving our cities inland. Imagine that. That's just the reality. And who knows what the effects of that, who knows if civilization would even survive that? And that would just be the beginning. Because if we get up to four degrees C then no one knows that that's stable, or whether that will automatically go to five or six, and for sure, then you're melting all of the ice, and the last time all of the ice was melted, you're talking 80 meters of sea level rise, something like that.

Catastrophic damage. Earth will not be the same, not for us anyway. And so it could be that then humans are gone, or at least civilization is gone, and it's game over for us. It's that serious. And so this is not one of those moments when we can all just be sort of hanging out, playing with our toys and being special little snowflakes. I know that sounds horrible, and it makes me sound like some kind of right-wing ideologue, but there's an element of this that's going on, where people are retreating from reality, and I don't blame them. This is what I was talking about when I said, ostriches with fancy headphones, canceling inconvenient moans. I understand why people want to escape from reality. I understand why people want to anesthetize themselves, but it's not constructive, and we don't have time for it. It's a time-limited situation we're facing. I feel that that needs to be said, and I'm not going to make any friends saying it either.

Nobody wants to hear this. But to answer your question, I don't think that anyone else in the dance music that I hear is saying this. Most of the dance music I hear doesn't have any lyrics, and if it does have lyrics, it's something along the lines of, hey, baby, dance, dance, dance. I don't think that Kate Tempest counts, because I don't consider that dance music in the sense that we're talking about. I consider Kate Tempest to be rap music. One of the reasons that I decided to make a rap album—which is basically what *Apologize to the Future* is—is because I was exposed to Kate Tempest's *Europe Is Lost*.

After I heard that, I thought two things. I thought, first of all, if Kate Tempest can rap, then I can rap. I mean seriously, I'm not going to be accused of cultural

appropriation or anything. She wasn't. So I felt okay about doing it, which I hadn't before. But second of all, I thought, it looks to me—I said to my partner at the time, I want to do this, and she's like, but you know nothing about rap music, and so she made me a playlist, and after I listened to whatever it was, 50 rap tracks, and had a kind of crash course in rap music, I thought—it looks to me like the torch of critique of society has moved to rap music.

It used to be—back in the day, when I was a kid—it was held by rock music. Social criticism came from rock bands. The Who is full of social criticism. Pink Floyd is wall-to-wall social criticism. Roger Waters is still doing it today. *Animals* and *Wish You Were Here*, these are really trenchant social criticism. But that all ended right when the eighties started. It became all about Cindy Lauper, party, party, party and Prince and stuff like this. Everything became reduced to hedonism and to a very superficial level, and that didn't change for a really long time. There were notable exceptions. You have things like Laurie Anderson with *O Superman*, you have some of Lou Reed's work, his late work. There were a few interesting exceptions, but for the most part, there was a drastic ascent of superficiality in musical culture throughout the 1990s, and it was very dispiriting for me.

And so I really don't see political stances coming from electronic dance music. If you can find me some examples, I'd like to hear them, but I'm not seeing it. I think even a band like Tool is way more political. I think metal is closer to being political than electronic dance music. Electronic dance music for me, is increasingly associated with hedonism, and not only that, but one of the symptoms of that is that increasingly people feel completely empowered to just ignore the music, and party and talk. That's not a good sign.

Again, I feel like I'm coming from an alien planet, but like I said, the first concert I saw—the first big stadium concert, in 1976—I remember being struck somewhere in there—maybe when they were playing *Black Dog* or whatever it was—I remember thinking, I could spend the rest of my life practicing the guitar and I would never, ever, ever be able to do this. What I just saw is like watching the Olympics of guitar, or the Olympics of drumming for that matter. It's just superhero stuff. Your jaw is [hanging down] like this, you are drooling, you scream at the end because you don't know what else to do. People all hold up their lighters because they're just blown away. They just can't believe what they just saw. Well, if I spend an evening at Berghain, I don't feel like that. I don't feel that I saw anything all that spectacular. It makes me sound horrible, it makes me sound like some kind of angry old lady, but I feel like I hung around watching a bunch of people drink and do drugs while some guy spins some records. There was not much to see. It doesn't feel like entertainment. I get that it has a social feature. I get that it gives people a safe space where they can be themselves and everybody can be the person that they want to be, and there's a LGBTQ aspect, especially at Berghain, but I don't consider that a substitute for a vibrant musical or political culture. You understand the point I'm making? The fact that everybody talks through it is a bad sign. If it were that spectacular, people wouldn't talk. They'd be amazed.

They'd sit there and watch and think, wow, that's fucking cool, I wish I could do that, and maybe someday I will. But I don't see that. I've never seen that. I mean, actually I have, I've seen techno shows that were that amazing, but not in decades.

There were a couple of shows I saw in Munich in the mid-nineties that were maybe that spectacular. But mind you, some of those were live acts too. I'm thinking of the Chicks On Speed. There was the time when they came out with fake instruments, that was pretty cool. They had all these fake drum machines and fake synthesizers made out of cardboard. That was pretty spectacular. It was only a half an hour, but it was a very entertaining half an hour. Nobody was talking. People were transfixed. Being transfixed is a good thing.

If it's that entertaining and that impressive and that emotionally moving, you should be transfixed by it. You shouldn't be chatting. And so this is what I said in the essay after all, what I said in *The DJ Pyramid* was, if we're going to have a revolution in music, we're going to have to stop partying to it, and learn to actually start listening to it. And it better be worth listening to. That's also part of the problem. It's a two-sided problem. It has two sides. Part of the reason people are ignoring it is because it's so ignorable. Now, if you print all this I'm going to lose all my followers, and nobody will ever buy my records again.

HI: Don't worry, it'll certainly gain you whole new audiences.

CK: You think? What audience? Explain your strange customs. What audience is going to admire that? I find it hard to believe.

HI: Yeah. But these are all wonderful and super important insights, and really intricate points too, that I hadn't thought about. If people are talking over the music, what are we actually listening to? And how do you galvanize the politics from that? If you're just partying.

CK: Yeah. And what's the connection between that and all the thousands of records that come out every year that are so indistinguishable that it's literally hard to tell them apart? They get used as tools for a reason, because they're so similar, and that also suggests this element of homogenization. People constantly complain about my records and how hard they are to mix, but I take it as a compliment. [laughs] When somebody tells me that, I'm glad. That's actually good news, that means that my work was successful. I made something that was really different and challenging. And if you can't mix it, you can't mix it, and I can't help you with that, but it's a good sign.

Again, we're into very dangerous territory, but there's a new essay that I haven't published, and it's about the elevation of DJing to high art and my critique of that. And so one of the points that I make—it's fair to say that *The DJ Pyramid* was the polite version, this time I take the gloves off and it's not so charming—and one of the points I make is that when I was a little kid, there was no mystique about DJing. DJing was just literally a thing that evolved out of record labels. Record labels encouraged radio stations to play their records, and they actually, in many cases, paid DJs to play the records. It's called payola, and it was a big thing in the 1950s that's not technically allowed anymore, but it totally was allowed back then.

And that's how record labels made certain records into hits. They would pay the DJs to play it more often. It's as simple as that. It was a job, like any other, and there wasn't a big mystique around it. The first time I went to a place that you could call a dance club, what would today be called a discotheque—the French word literally

means a place where there's music for people to dance to, that's all it means, nothing about the style of music, the word discotheque is much older, it just basically means a place where people go to dance to music—so the first time I went to a discotheque was in Switzerland in the seventies, and they played The Doors. They played *Light My Fire*, and it was great.

They played the whole thing, all seven minutes. It's a great song. I mean, sorry, but that's way, way more entertaining music than anything I've heard in a nightclub lately. It's extremely dynamic. It's got a lot of ideas in it. It's got those great Middle Eastern guitar solos. It's got the crazy organ music. It's got Jim Morrison with that deep voice. They didn't even write this song [false, The Doors did write it, apologies] but they brought it to life in a way that was just so powerful, and I remember thinking, wow, this is perfect actually, who would want more? They played other hits. They played 10cc and Deep Purple, *Smoke on the Water* and all that seventies music. But the DJ I don't remember at all, what DJ?

I'm sure there was one, there was some guy spinning the records, and when one stopped, he'd play the next one, but nobody paid any attention to that. He wasn't even visible, I don't think. He was off there somewhere in the corner in some little booth with his turntables. What I'm saying, though it sounds horrible, what I'm saying is that I remember before DJing as art, that's a much later development. That's a post-eighties thing. It started in the late seventies in gay clubs, in 1975 or whatever, but unless you were gay and living in New York at that time, you wouldn't have known about it. It became a mainstream thing in the late seventies, early eighties. It spread to straight clubs and it became a worldwide thing, and suddenly it became all about DJing, and scratch came, and it became something you might've seen on TV, but that's relatively recent from my point of view.

And even at the time, I remember thinking, why is this so special? What is the point about this exactly? How is this a substitute, for example, for watching The Grateful Dead for a couple of hours, which I did. Oh, so provocative. Yes, I was a deadhead. The Dead were amazing, by the way, amazing. I mean, in terms of lyrics, right up there with Joni Mitchell. They were a biker band, so of course they only wrote about things that are important to bikers, they only wrote about drug addiction, death, gambling, crime, murder, cheating on your wife, all that. It was very, very dark, but wonderful. It really had so much emotional range. And yeah, on a bad night they sang like sick cats, but on a good night, it was like nothing else you've ever seen.

The whole place, a whole stadium full of people on LSD and the Dead are playing in odd time, half the time, there's that! Go back and listen to *Terrapin Station*. Go find the song—what's it called?—*Estimated Prophet*. That is the slickest playing in 7/4 that I've ever heard. They make it sound easy. [sings the guitar line]. Seven. Amazing. There really was a lot of competition for the DJ disco thing. It wasn't a simple battle, but those of us who saw it come, we knew there was trouble coming. There was a year, 1979 was the year when the trouble really came and arrived at the front door, and the symptom was that all the big progressive rock bands that we knew and loved suddenly put out a disco single.

Why? Because they wanted to? No. They did it because their managers and their record labels came to them and they said, listen, here's the deal. Either you put a

disco single on your record, or the kids aren't going to buy it, and we're going to fire your asses. So Pink Floyd released *Another Brick in the Wall*, Grateful Dead released *Shakedown Street*, the Rolling Stones released, I don't know, *Miss You* or one of those other ones. There was a whole bunch of them. Suddenly we were awash in classic rock and progressive rock bands playing disco, and we're all like, what the fuck? What's this? We liked it better before, no, oh my God, they all sold out, and then they all disappeared because the culture changed. So what's up with that? This is all I'm trying to say, is how do we change something this big and this fundamental? How do we make culture less superficial?

Well, the problem is, it's not really within the power of any individual to change that, because it's unavoidably tied to how people are educated and therefore tied to larger issues, social issues, like how is money spent, and who has it? Is government in the business of enriching people's lives or not? If we listen to the Republicans and their equivalents in other countries, there wouldn't be any government. That's what they're always saying, right? They're not shy about it. They come around and say, we hate government. We want to destroy government. There shouldn't be any government. The government should only exist to make life easy for corporations, and there shouldn't be any regulations either, so we can dump shit in the water. And we live in a world shaped by that ideology. In a world like that, people are going to get dumber, because no one gives a shit about them. The rich people, they send their kids to private schools. Yeah. That's how it works. That's how it worked before the wars. Most people were dumb because they just didn't have a chance to be otherwise. This is all I'm saying. This is the real critique at the heart of the whole shebang—the Church of Euthanasia, my music, my art, my everything—at the heart of it is awareness of this collapse of solidarity, and the collapse of social cohesion. Pretty glum.

HI: Glum, sure, but spot-on, I think. So thank you for that, Chris. We've been going for two hours, so I think I've got plenty of material here, to get going at least. So thank you so much.

CK: Oh, you're so welcome. But I feel really bad, I feel like this always happens when people interview me. I feel like I talk too much and I should've listened to you more. Is there something, is there any question that you feel that I really didn't answer that you want me to answer? Something specific.

HI: I have so much, and this was just so generous and filled with a wealth of knowledge and ideas, and lines of flight to follow, I think too. I have so much more, and I think as I go to actually start to put pen to paper here, maybe I can touch base if other things come up, or if I feel like I haven't covered something properly yet, if that's alright with you?

CK: That is totally all right. I have no plans to go anywhere serious. I'm going on a little trip this coming weekend, but just a short one, and other than that, I have no plans to go anywhere until the Garbicz festival in early August, so I'm around.

HI: Cool. Well, that's great. Well this has just been a real pleasure, and I'm really, really happy we were able to make it work. And thank you so much for all your time, Chris.

CK: It's really my pleasure. I felt this was a delightful interview. It really was. We really got right to the core of the whole thing.

HI: Yeah. We certainly did.

CK: And that happens only very rarely.

HI: No, I think we certainly, definitely got to the heart of something.

CK: We killed it, as we used to say back in the day.

HI: Yeah. So thank you so much, Chris. Thank you. I will be in touch, okay?

CK: All right.

HI: Take care. Bye.

CK: Bye.